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Life Long Learning and Skills Development: An Investment in
Botswana Human Capital for the Development of the
Emerging Knowledge Economy

**Author: Joanna Rocke-Collymore, Department of Technical
Vocational Education and Training
Ministry of Education and Skills Development**

Botswana

Email address: jcollymore@gov.bw

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1.0 Introduction

This paper focuses on The Botswana Technical Education Program (BTEP) which emanated from the need to provide flexible, relevant, technical education and training for the youth in Botswana. The discussion focuses on a case study of the Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy Department's initiative to offer selected modules through Open and Distance Learning (ODL). It discusses the BTEP model because of its policies which provide for lifelong learning, flexible delivery as well as a robust quality assurance system.

In the discussion on the background of BTEP reference is made to the national policies that initiated its development and an overview of the architecture of the programmed is briefly outlined. The main discussion highlights issues emanating from the planning, developing and implementing of Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy modules through ODL. The intention is to stimulate interest in ODL in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and provide a benchmark for use in the development and delivery of ODL TVET programmers.

2.0 Background

Botswana is in its third phase of economic development; that of transforming its economic activity from one based on primary natural resources to one based on its intellectual capital. The focus is to provide education and training that are relevant and that will enable the workforce to participate successfully in the emerging knowledge economy. In this regard there are a series of government policies that drive this agenda.

BTEP can be seen as a response to a context first elaborated in the National Commission on Education (1993) and the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) which emphasized the need to equip learners with skills to provide opportunities for increasing numbers of school leavers; to provide skilled workers for local business and industry; to ensure equity and to increase access to vocational education. The aim is to provide lifelong training opportunities and to prepare students for self-employment.

The National Development Plan 9 (NDP9) (2003-09) stresses the need to equip learners with skills to enable them to enter into self-employment as well as create the opportunity for lifelong learning (15.1) and commits the Government to the provision of equitable and all-inclusive education (15.44). It affirms the need to diversify modes of learning and improved delivery. (15.42).

The National Policy on Vocational Education and Training (NaPVET) addresses issues of integration, access, equity and quality within the Vocational Education and Training sector and elaborates a vision and specific objectives.

The Labour Market Entrants Report_(1998) indicates that statistical analysis reveals that there was an unemployment rate for persons with no schooling of 65.1% whereas the unemployment level of persons with primary education dropped to 59.9%, and the unemployment rate for persons with tertiary education qualifications

was 42.0%. This information strengthened the case for continued investment in education.

The Long Term Vision for Botswana: Vision 2016, of making Botswana a learned society and its aim to build human capacity for employment, including self-employment and income generation has resulted in the establishment of the National Training Policy, the National Training Act and the establishment of a National Training Authority.

Vision 2016 clearly sets out the goal for Vocational Education and Training. It states that:

“Botswana must set the highest possible standards for vocational and technical training as well as for academic excellence.” (p. 17)

The Department of Technical Vocational Education and Training (DTVET) has a very important role in the development of a skilled workforce. NDP9 tasks DTVET:

“To provide technical and vocational education and training that meets the needs of the local labour market, developed to high international quality criteria and that incorporates the latest developments in technology” (NDP9 p. 296).

The Vocational Education and Training sector was targeted as a priority for increased support for building a skilled workforce during National Development Plan 7. This continued throughout NDP 8:

“The future economic growth of Botswana will depend on the extent to which its labour force has the skills and technical ability to make it competitive in the global market place, by...providing occupational and pre-employment training to be undertaken after schooling.” (p. 357)

This also conformed to one of the goals of Vision 2016 whereby:

“All Batswana will have the opportunity for continued and universal education... Education must be made more flexible, so that people can enter and leave the education system at different times of their lives” (p. 7).

The BTEP Blueprint (2010) which is the overarching document that sets out the architecture of BTEP explicitly states that BTEP, through its flexible mode of delivery, will create access, opportunity and pathways of progression. DTVET Technical colleges also have their own policies regarding flexible delivery. These policies are aimed at supporting creative ways of opening access and providing progression to a wide spectrum of learners. It is within this context that the Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy Department was motivated to provide ODL modules.

3. BTEP Overview

At present there are over twenty-five BTE programmes, either being offered or in various stages of development. These are shown in the table below:

Botswana Technical Education Programmes

Foundation Level	Certificate Level	Advanced Certificate Level	Diploma Level
Agro-based Industry	Agro-based Industries	Beauty Therapy	Beauty Therapy
Building Construction	Building Construction	Business Administration	Business Administration
Business	Business	Electrical and Mechanical	Electrical and Mechanical
Clothing, Design and Textiles	Clothing, Design and Textiles	Engineering	Engineering
Electrical and Mechanical	Electrical and Mechanical	Information and Communications Technology	Network Technician Systems
Engineering	Engineering	Multimedia	Administrator
Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy	Hairdressing		
Hospitality and Tourism	Hospitality Operations		
Information and Communications Technology	Information and Communications Technology		
Sports, Recreation and Leisure	Laboratory Science		
	Multimedia		
	Sports, Recreation and Leisure		
	Travel and Tourism		

Table 1: BTE Programmes

BTEP is an Outcome Based TVET qualification made up of modules. The programme includes; mandatory and elective units as well as components in Key Skills, an Integrated Project and Work Experience. These programmes are delivered through traditional face-to-face mode. However, its modular composition lends itself favorably to flexible modes of delivery. BTEP has clear level descriptors for every level of learning. Each credit in the programme is equal to forty notional hours.

4.0 Establishing the Need

A survey was conducted by FCTVE in 2007 to determine the demand for distance education in Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy and to get an idea of the student profile. (FCTVE Survey of Employers and Employees in Hairdressing and Beauty Salons 2007) Data showed that there were many Botswana General Certificate Examination Exam (BGCSE) school leavers, unskilled and unemployed. However, Hairdressing and Beauty therapy gave many of them the opportunity to work in salons and learn through in- house mentoring and training.

The research indicated that “76% of the respondents had not received any formal training. The remaining 24% of the respondents had training from either National Craft Certificate (NCC) or private providers. None had BTEP training.

Another research was conducted (2007) on BTEP Certificate graduates to determine the level of interest in studying The Human Body through ODL. This unit is a prerequisite to progress to the Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy.

The results indicated that this group was very enthusiastic to study through ODL in order to acquire this unit. They were particularly excited about being able to continue working and studying on their own time. Based on the findings of both surveys the following target audience for ODL was identified:

- Unqualified therapists, in the workplace
- Graduates from the Certificate in Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy who wished to progress to Advanced Certificate level

It is worth noting that curriculum developers soon realized that the development of ODL material would also benefit lecturers and students during face to face delivery.

Another factor that confirmed the need for ODL in H & B is the fact that each year Gaborone Technical college (GTC) has hundreds of applications for Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy. An example of this is that in February 2010 there were over 500 applications for 32 places in the programme. (GTC enrollment statistics 2010). ODL could address this gap, which is one of the intentions of all the aforementioned policies.

5.0 Challenges of Starting ODL

The challenges of starting the ODL in H&B are categorized as the following:

Challenges faced by Lecturers	Challenges faced by Learners	Administrative Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support from management since H&B were not identified as a critical area for ODL (in relation to the need to develop ODL for teacher training) • Quality issues with regard to accuracy of content • Lack of skills and experience in the development and delivery of ODL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor study skills • Limited knowledge of and access to ICT • No experience in ODL and self-directed learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear procedures for engaging a graphic artist • Inadequate printing capacity • Providing opportunity for ODL learners to use resource centres • Establishing an interactive platform for learners and lectures to communicate and for learners to access material • Adherence to copyright laws • Accessing use of copyrighted material

6. Developing Material

In spite of these challenges the programme team set out to develop and pilot ODL in H & B. The existing Learning Unit Specifications and national assessments provided the point of departure and guide. The general goal was to:

- Provide quality learning material that enabled learners to study on their own time, acquire recognition of achievement and progress to advanced levels.

The student profile determined the medium and delivery mode. The development team decided on developing material in print and delivery through

a mixed mode. However, learners were able to access material and lecturers on the college Moodle platform. It is envisioned that The Human Body would be available on line in the future giving learners the opportunity to access material, engage in tutorials and complete formative and summative assessments.

7.0 Instructional Design

The material was developed using sound pedagogical principles. Some of these principles included:

- Recognition of learners' need to know why they need to learn about The Human Body
- Self-directed learning; this was assisted by developing a learners' study guide and an assessment schedule
- Motivation: positive feedback was built into the material so that learners could identify their learning gaps and refer to correct responses
- Advance organisers were used to introduce the topics and to provide a conceptual framework for the new material
- The material was broken into small chunks of learning

8.0 Piloting The Human Body through ODL

The Human Body was piloted at two colleges; each college had an intake of thirty students. One group was made up of practicing therapists; the other consisted of full time students. Both groups required extensive tutor support and most students had to be re-assessed. Students found difficulty in managing their time in relation to the requirements of the material. They had difficulty grasping difficult concepts. However, most students completed the unit successfully. Practising hairdressers and therapists experienced more difficulty than the full time students.

Lecturers were also challenged by this new approach and underestimated aspects such as learners' difficulty in managing study time and conducting tutorials based on traditional approaches which did not impart sufficient skills in self-directed learning.

Tutorials were held weekly. Learners were also able to contact their lecturers telephonically or through email. Learners used the facilities at the Learning Resource Centre during specified times. This opportunity enhanced their skills and confidence in ICT.

9.0 Evaluating the Pilot

The pilot was evaluated using methods which included interviews, focus groups, desk review of assessment and administrative records and review of ODL material. Lecturers, course developers, quality assurance and learners were involved in the evaluation.

The main objectives of the evaluation were to determine the appropriateness of:

- learner profile
- learning material e.g. activities, feedback
- the timing of assessments

the effectiveness of:

- learning material
- tutorials
- learner support

the correctness of:

- content and
- assessments

The evaluation resulted in revised criteria for student selection; increased tutor support; corrections to and adjustment to the assessment schedule and instruments of assessments; training of lecturers and contractual arrangements for the use of copyrighted material.

Students performed much better following these corrective measures. Lecturers became more comfortable with the material and were able to foreshadow problems and take steps to address them. There has been more support for the initiative from management. One reason for this is that the H & B department was able to improve student /teacher ratio and increase utilization of salons.

The project demonstrated the fact that all TVET programmes could give learners the opportunity to study through ODL. This mixed mode approach has had the following advantages:

- it improved the quality of material and thus enhanced teaching and learning
- it enabled therapists who were employed to study on their own time without sacrificing their jobs
- it increased the opportunity for more practical sessions by freeing up time spent on face- to- face delivery of theoretical units; this was a critical advantage since employers had complained about the programme being too theoretical and insufficient time spent on developing technical know- how
- members of the development team gained additional skills and felt a great sense of pride and achievement resulting in increased motivation
- ODL material added value to and increased the image of H &B and TVET
- both lecturers and learners increased their skills in self-directed learning
- curriculum developers increased their knowledge of curriculum planning, design, delivery and evaluation

10.0 Conclusion

This paper provided a brief overview of the national policies that are aimed at transforming Botswana into a knowledge economy. It highlighted the important role of TVET in implementing these policies, which seek to open access to learners and to enable them to acquire the skills and technical ability to make Botswana competitive in the global market place.

The structure of BTEP was briefly described in order to contextualize its appropriateness for ODL. The main focus was on the experience of the H & B Department in developing, piloting and evaluating the BTEP unit- The Human Body (in mixed mode).

The challenges with regard to lecturers, learners and administration were identified as well as the advantages that accrued from the pilot. In conclusion, the pilot was a success as it increased access, student/teacher ratio as well as increased utilization of salons. One of the main advantages was the increased opportunity to improve competence since learners had more time to practice. Educators also felt that they had increased their knowledge of curriculum design and delivery. It is envisioned that the H & B department will develop material in ODL for all of the theoretical aspects of learning and that other BTE programmes will also recognize their role in opening access and improving the quality of teaching and learning through ODL.

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